

SOUTH AFRICA

Country Profile on Drugs and Crime

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**Regional Office
for Southern Africa**

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As of 1 October 2002, the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (ODCCP) was renamed the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (ODC). It is comprised of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Centre of International Crime Prevention (CICP).

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FOREWORD

At the dawn of the new millennium, the unfortunate reality is that drug abuse, drug trafficking, crime, terrorism and corruption are global problems that touch every corner of the world. Moreover, they are inseparably linked to each other. Thus, not only do these phenomena cause havoc domestically, particularly for vulnerable nations striving to meet the basic development needs of their people, but they also threaten international prosperity and stability in the ever-increasing interconnected world in which we live. Fortunately, policy makers are beginning to recognize that combating these evils is not simply a matter of law enforcement, but also one of prevention. In this global market place that trades in human misery, there must be a reduction in demand as well as supply if the international community is to prevail over these evils.

South Africa is an important link in this international network. Today, the country is fully engaged in the activities of the region and the African continent, indeed, in the activities of the world. As a result, eight years after its new democracy burst onto the global stage, South Africa finds itself with a significant drug and crime challenge, as do many other nations. In South Africa's case, however, it finds itself having to confront the additional burden of serving as the regional hub for these illicit and dangerous activities. As with any nation, this in turn makes it more difficult for South Africa to pursue its goals of empowering its citizens and improving their lives. It also inhibits the attainment of broader goals, such as those of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as the effort of countering drugs and crime must compete for limited resources and energy that also are needed for such challenges as creating employment opportunities and stopping the devastating spread of HIV/AIDS. The good news is that although South Africa is facing this increasingly difficult challenge, it has recognized the need to meet it, and positive steps have been taken to meet it.

This Country Profile is intended to present a picture of South Africa's current drug and crime situation, as well as the related problems of terrorism and corruption, and the countermeasures being undertaken to oppose them. In some sense, it is meant to be a snapshot of today's reality, but in fact, wherever possible, we have endeavored to indicate both how that reality came about and how it is likely to evolve. In a similar vein, we also have tried to show a panorama of the wide range of social, economic and other demographic influences that bear on both the nature of these complex problems as well as their potential solutions.

Our hope is that this Country Profile will assist the people and Government of South Africa in their quest to reduce the problems of drugs and crime, both at home and abroad. We also hope that it will provide the international community with insights into the challenge facing South Africa so that informed international cooperation and assistance will be enhanced. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime will continue to support these efforts.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DRUGS

South Africa in the Regional Context. South Africa is by far the largest market for illicit drugs entering Southern Africa. Drug trafficking and abuse have escalated in recent years, with the point of escalation traceable to the liberalization of most aspects of society in the years immediately surrounding the country's first democratic elections in 1994. This recent period also witnessed a concomitant relaxation of strict controls of land, air and sea borders, the enhancement of international trade and commerce, and the influx of new cultural trends among the more affluent segments of the population.

Consumption Trends. Cannabis is the most prevalent illicit drug used in South Africa. "Mandrax" (methaqualone) is the second most commonly-used illicit drug. Although the use of heroin, cocaine and ecstasy is less prevalent, this has increased notably since the mid-1990s. Since 2000, heroin use has also increased significantly in major urban areas, particularly in Gauteng (which includes Johannesburg and Pretoria) and Cape Town. In 2001, among treatment patients reporting heroin as their primary drug of abuse, evidence points to 51% of such patients in Cape Town reporting some injecting (or 'intravenous') use and 36% doing so in Gauteng. One risk associated with injecting heroin is the spread of HIV/AIDS. The second half of 2001 also witnessed the appearance of heroin users among the impoverished Black/African communities in South Africa's urban and peri-urban areas.

Ethnic Segmentation. Although increasing social ethnic integration is evident, the drug consumption markets of South Africa remain ethnically differentiated. The extreme income inequalities between the different broad ethnic segments affect drug affordability and thus consumer choice.

Drug Use and HIV/AIDS. Ongoing research in South Africa is demonstrating a link (other than that related to injecting drug use) between substance abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS. It indicates that adolescents who use alcohol and other drugs are more likely to engage in sex and in unsafe sex than are adolescents who abstain from using them.

Prevention and Treatment. Official funding for both prevention and treatment is very limited. The health and education sectors have been only minimally involved in prevention activities. The non-governmental community plays an active role in both sectors. There is currently no national programme for primary prevention or awareness campaign.

Trafficking Trends. The drug trafficking activities of organized crime groups are linked to numerous other criminal acts, ranging from car hijackings and robberies, to the smuggling of firearms, stolen cars, endangered species and precious metals. South Africa now features prominently in international drug trafficking networks.

Law Enforcement. South Africa has the necessary legislative infrastructure to effect drug countermeasures and is aware of current production and trafficking trends. The specialized investigation units are being phased out of the police force. The impact of this on the country's medium- to long-term capacity to deal effectively with the threat posed by organized criminal groups dealing in drugs is unclear.

CRIME

General Trends. Overall levels of crime began to increase in the mid-1980s and continued throughout the 1990s. There are some indications, however, that the steep increase in crime has been abated in the last year or two; nevertheless, South Africa remains among the most crime-ridden and crime-concerned societies in the world. Also, organized crime, with clear international and regional links, has increased. Recently, the government has increased its criminal justice budget considerably.

Geographic Variations. The two most developed provinces, Gauteng and Western Cape, with high concentrations of business, public administration and urban centres (Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town), are the two most crime-ridden, with the highest rates for violent, property and commercial crime. Among rural crimes, stock (livestock) theft is high in the remaining seven provinces.

Socio-economic Variations. Crime does not affect all people uniformly, and the risk of being a crime victim is strongly influenced by gender, ethnicity, age, income and place of residence. Ethnicity is still one important factor patterns in South Africa due to the legacy of the apartheid regime's policy of using race to determine much of one's socio-economic status. Thus, for example, while Blacks/Africans are at a higher risk for individual violent crimes, non-Blacks/Africans are at higher risk for property-related household crimes. Property and violent crimes pose the greatest risk for urban residents.

Violent Crime. Violent crimes, such as attempted murder, aggravated robbery, serious and common assault, and in particular violence against women and children (including rape of children), has shown a general increase since 1994 with a slight down turn in 2001-2002. Reported rates of rape are at the most serious levels in the world, and there is much concern about the increase in violence against women and in particular against children. Murder rates, by contrast, have been declining since 1994, by almost 30%. Much of the violence is attributed to the proliferation of firearms, both as a cross-border organized crime trafficking problem and as they are illegally appropriated for domestic criminal purposes.

Organized Crime. Organized crime in its many manifestations is highly present in South Africa and comprises a range of criminal activities from trafficking in drugs, firearms, persons and stolen vehicles, to smuggling of precious materials and endangered species, involving local, transnational and foreign organized crime groups. Recently instituted organized crime countermeasures, including a new strategy, laws, asset forfeiture operations, and investigative and prosecutorial structures, have made considerable achievements in dismantling certain organized crime groups and monitoring trends in syndicate activities and targets.

Corruption. Facing an ever-increasing public concern about corruption, the government has adopted a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy for the public sector, new anti-corruption legislation is under consideration, and considerable efforts to unveil corruption's roots and to promote "good governance and transparency" are being undertaken. There remain considerable problems in the coordination of the various agencies with anti-corruption mandates.

Crime Prevention. Fear of crime has resulted in an enormous growth in the private security industry and in reforms within the police force. The police are introducing new approaches to policing (“crackdown police areas” and “sector” policing), as well as the creation of metropolitan police services and the promotion of more police involvement with the local communities. There are some indications of increasing citizen confidence in the police, which over the past few years has been reflected in the increased reporting of crimes to the police.

Criminal Justice Reform. The entire criminal justice system has undergone substantial and substantive transformation and reorganization in the post-apartheid era. While much improvement has been achieved, there are still considerable problems in processing crimes and offenders through the criminal justice system, with particularly acute blockages at the judicial and correctional levels.

International Cooperation and Anti-Terrorism. South Africa has signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime as well as two of its protocols: trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and smuggling of migrants. It also is a signatory to new two SADC (Southern African Development Community) protocols on corruption and firearms. South Africa has ratified most of the international anti-terrorism conventions.